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29 April 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversation with Senator George McGovern re Drug  
Problem in Southeast Asia

1. This afternoon I met with Senator McGovern and his Staff Assistant, John Holum in response to the Senator's letter of 13 April 1971 inquiring about possible Agency knowledge of or involvement in drug traffic in Southeast Asia. I told the Senator I preferred to answer the questions contained in his letter orally and privately so that I could be completely forthcoming, which would not be the case in an unclassified written reply and I then proceeded to make the following points:

a. The Agency has never in any way participated directly or indirectly in, or condoned the production, distribution, or use of opium, heroin or other hard drugs.

b. Wherever possible we have tried to discourage opium production and distribution, especially among certain tribes in Southeast Asia with whom we are in contact.

c. These efforts have had some success. In particular we have been able to persuade the Meo tribes in northern Laos to shift some of their efforts from opium production to rice production. In fact, in the current issue of Foreign Affairs, Roland Paul, who recently surveyed the area for the Foreign Relations Committee, writes that "...it may be interesting to note that because of their long association with the American agency (CIA), the hill tribes have shifted their agricultural emphasis from opium to rice."

d. Meo opium production has been further curtailed as a result of the disruption of the war, and we understand is no longer a significant factor in the world supply.

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e. Our investigation reveals no evidence of any significant opium production at Long Tieng.

f. We understand that some Chinese irregular armies operating in the "fertile triangle" area including parts of Burma, northern Thailand, and northern Laos, do profit from the opium traffic, mainly by charging duty on caravans coming through their areas. However, CIA has no connection with these armies.

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h. Opium production in Laos has been going on for centuries, and certainly CIA is in no position to put a stop to this traditional activity, any more than Federal agents were able to eradicate corn whiskey in Appalachia during prohibition. But we certainly have never protected or condoned opium production in any way.

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j. We are aware that attempts have been made to smuggle opium on aircraft in and out of opium-producing areas, including aircraft under Agency control. Whenever we have had evidence of these attempts we have taken prompt preventive action, fired any individuals involved who were in Agency employ, and have cooperated with the Bureau of Narcotics in developing evidence for the prosecution of any Americans implicated.

2. Senator McGovern said he was glad to know we were doing what we could to cope with the problem, and appreciated my frank answers. I reminded him that the general problem was not within the Agency's competence or responsibility but he could be sure that we were as concerned about it as anybody, were trying to do all we could to cope with it, and were actively cooperating with the Bureau of Narcotics.

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3. Senator McGovern asked if it would be possible to get a letter formally responding to his written inquiry to the Director. I said that in such a letter we could not go into the points that I had covered, and the letter really wouldn't say anything except to acknowledge the Senator's inquiry. I said I couldn't speak for the Director, but would be glad to convey the Senator's request.

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